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Bringing Monuments to Life at Gettysburg

State and national parks, museums, historical sites, and similar types of cultural resources often complement the programs of educational institutions. Such was certainly the case with an undergraduate, interdisciplinary course given at The University of Toledo in the spring of 1994. *Hallowed Ground: Monuments, Memory and the American Civil War* was devoted to historic and artistic aspects of monuments erected on Civil War battlefields during the late-19th century. Taught by sculptor Thomas Lingeman and art historian Richard Putney, the course employed an unusual methodology. Assuming historical roles, students acted as committees of artists and veterans working in the late-19th century and designed monuments dedicated to regiments that fought in the battle of Gettysburg, July 1-3, 1863.

1. Park Ranger Scott Hartwig, Gettysburg National Military Park, lecturing to the course participants beside the monument to the 69th Pennsylvania Volunteers. Photo by the author.

Even though neither instructor had formal education or teaching experience in Civil War history, we both shared a long interest in the sculptures at Gettysburg. I had been systematically photographing the battlefield monuments, while Tom had been examining the materials and techniques used to create them with the well-trained eye of the sculptor. We realized the vast educational potential that the Gettysburg site and its works of art offered, and gradually formed a plan for an interdisciplinary course on Civil War monuments. The course would emphasize experiences that would allow course participants to appreciate fully the significance and impact of the monuments.

The course curriculum had two major segments. The first focused on motivating students through their learning the basic history of the Civil War and its memorials. In the second segment, students would design monuments for the Gettysburg site. A class trip to Gettysburg would be the all-important bridge between the two segments, helping the students synthesize the information from the first part of the course, and inspiring them in the design phase awaiting them in the second.

We opened the course with a series of carefully selected reading assignments, classroom discussions and field trips to pertinent local historic sites. Reading assignments included Michael Shaara's *The Killer Angels* and Shelby Foote's *The Stars in Their Courses*. Both works—one a novel and the other a more conventional work of history—are excellent introductions to the battle. Slides of the Gettysburg battlefield accompanied class discussion of the readings, and the students were able to examine Civil War weapons and artifacts on loan from a local collector.

We concluded the first segment of the course by turning from the history of the battle of Gettysburg to Americans' memories and interpretations of it. We read Garry Wills' Pulitzer Prize winning book, *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, and complemented our discussions of remembrance and the war's commemoration with on-site studies of local monuments, 19th-century cemeteries, and the site of a camp for Confederate prisoners of war.

By now, the students were immersed in the Battle of Gettysburg and its significance, the ethos of 19th-century memorials, orations and funerary customs, and provided us with an understanding of the relationship between funerary monuments in general, and those dedicated to the Civil War in particular. Next came the first-hand study of the Gettysburg site.

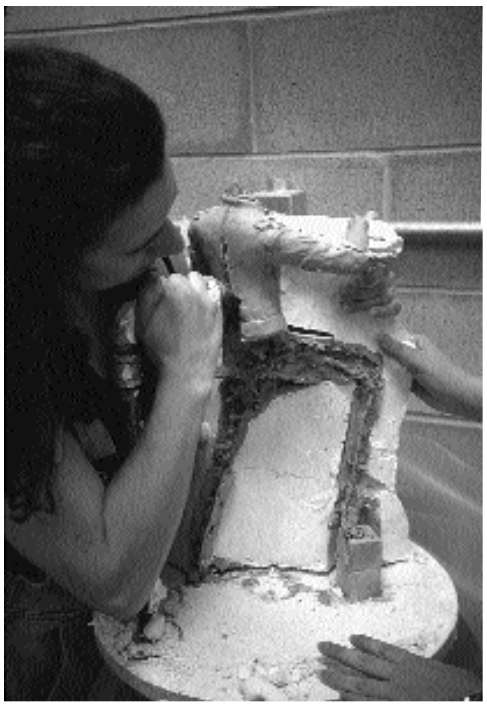
Our four-day visit in late April created vivid images focusing on the evocative relationships of

2. Student Michael Dorn examines the monument to the 20th Maine Regiment on Little Round Top at Gettysburg National Military Park Photo by the author.

monuments and landscape in the national military park. Driving through the dying light of sunset one evening, for example, we parked near the top of Little Round Top; we climbed its eastern slope, passed over its crest and approached the bronze statue of General Gouverneur K. Warren. Sharing his high vantage point, we took in a landscape of rolling ridges cut by the dark lines of trees; because of the dramatic placement of Warren's statue, it was easy to imagine what he had seen during the battle. Indeed, the abstraction of a battlefield map—its topography reduced to contour lines and its regiments of soldiers to rectangles—took on a more immediate meaning which was impossible to forget. It was also clear why it had been so important to recall the memory of Warren's foresight and decisiveness with a well-placed monument.

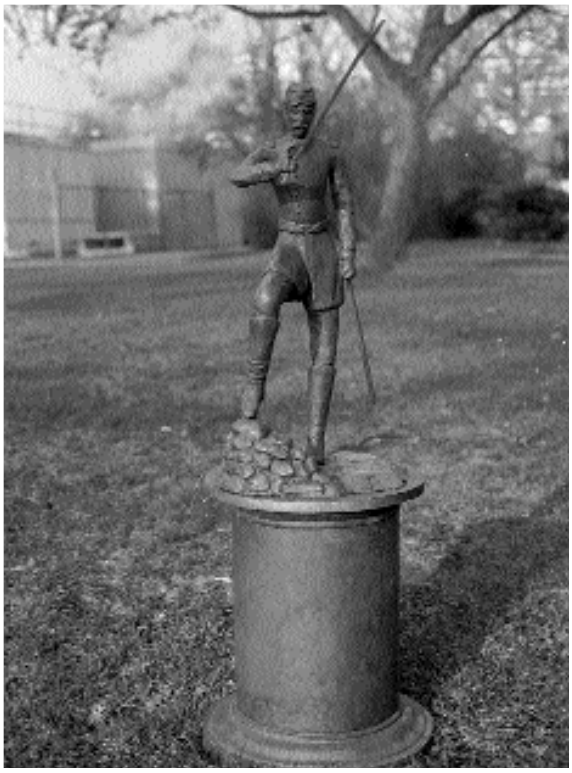
3. Student Kelly Asadorian opens the mold of the 20th Maine Monument. Photo by the author.

One morning a group of us entered the National Cemetery. Standing in the dew-drenched grass, we admired the yellow light of daybreak illuminating row upon row of marble slabs; here and there, black metal tablets carried sentimental inscriptions, their forms casting long shadows in the raking light of dawn. All of us felt a marvelous sense of serenity, but also the irony of such an emotion in a place once scarred by gruesome sacrifice.

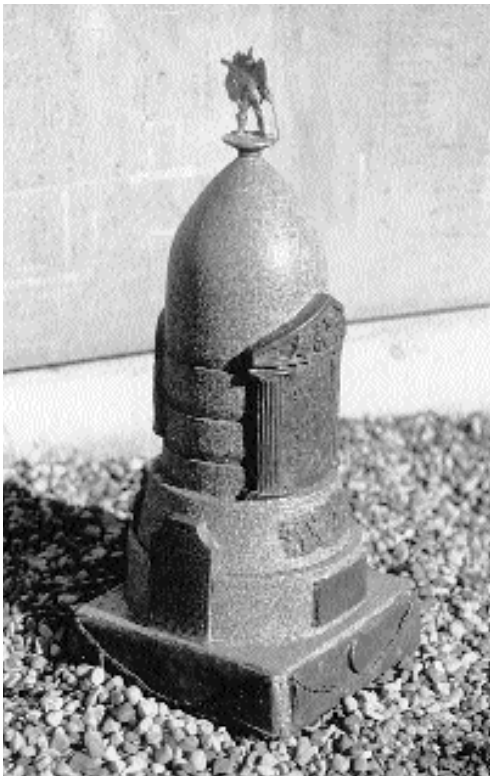


Later that day, we followed the eroded, meandering line of some old trenches on the wooded and gently sloping ridge of Culp's Hill; moving up the hill we passed monument after monument. Under the trees at the side of the park road, we came upon a handsome one dedicated to the 123rd New York Infantry; at its summit the granite image of a woman in classical garb sat at ease in the dappled light. Bearing silent witness, she inscribed upon a tablet invisible words meant to live forever; somehow we felt we knew the importance of her words, we understood them. Our readings, our discussions and, above all, our immediate experiences on the site had allowed us to see this landscape through the eyes of the previous century: trees, hills, plowed fields, farmhouses and barns, rail fences, fieldstone walls, slabs of granite, metal tablets, cannon, figures of bronze, inscriptions. "Look," these things seemed to tell us, "read our words and remember!"

A lecture by park ranger Scott Hartwig on Cemetery Ridge added to an already memorable visit to the park (figure 1). He led us a few hundred feet to a modest granite obelisk erected in honor of the 69th Pennsylvania Volunteers, a Philadelphia unit which had suffered the brunt of Pickett's Charge on July 3, 1863. Before he spoke, Scott positioned our group so we looked out over a low stone wall—marking the regiment's only substantial line of defense—to the broad, open fields crossed by the Confederate infantrymen in their final assault. In this setting it was easy to imagine the fearful culmination of the battle. Scott related aspects of the regiment's formation—the working-



4. The monument designed and fabricated by students of the Joshua Chamberlain / 20th Maine group. Photo by Kathleen Brown.



5. The monument designed and fabricated by students of the 69th Pennsylvania group. Photo by the author.

class background of the Irishmen who composed the unit, their induction into uniform, their less than glorious departure from the City of Brotherly Love—and then focused on their fearful experiences on July 3. Scott's account was inspiring, at times grisly, and impossible to forget.

Students also communed individually with monuments that appealed to them. Each was asked to explore a favorite portion of the battlefield and write general descriptions of at least three monuments, recording their inscriptions and sketching their images in a course journal. That portion of our work complete, we were ready to return home.

Upon our return to Toledo, Tom's sculpture studio became our second home. The class divided into three design groups and each chose a regiment that had played a significant role in the battle. Not surprisingly, one group chose to memorialize the 69th Pennsylvania, whose dramatic engagement on Cemetery Ridge had been conveyed so effectively by Scott Hartwig. Another chose the 6th Wisconsin Volunteers, whose successful charge against Confederates sheltered in a railroad cut was an isolated Union triumph during the first day of battle. The third group selected the 20th Maine Volunteers, a unit that played a momentous role during the second day of the battle and was described vividly in *The Killer Angels*. In choosing the 20th Maine Volunteers, the students said that the men led so heroically by Joshua Chamberlain deserved a more fitting monument than the one they had seen on the south slope of Little Round Top (figure 2). In assuming historic roles, of course, the members of each group had to imagine not only that they were working in the 19th century, but also that the monument which today represents their unit at Gettysburg had not yet been designed or erected.

6. The monument designed and fabricated by students of the 6th Wisconsin group. Photo by the author.

The design groups were to honor their units with monuments conforming to the rules formulated in 1888 by the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association. These rules specified acceptable construction materials, the key information that inscriptions should include, and the process for securing permission to place a monument. During the last seven weeks of the course, each group created its monument on paper, and then produced a bronze maquette (figure 3). They fabricated a three-dimensional prototype in wax, surrounded it with a ceramic shell mold, burned away the wax original, and filled the mold with a cascade of molten bronze. Once opened, the mold yielded a roughly-surfaced bronze version of the group's prototype, which the student sculptors then had to clean, finish and patinate. And all of this was accomplished by a class that had only a few students with any experience in bronze casting.

In addition to fabricating the maquettes, each group prepared a topographic plan to site its monument on the battlefield, wrote a dedication speech in a rhetorical style appropriate to the 19th century, and produced other written materials related to its project. One group wrote letters home from a fictitious member of its unit, another wrote a short regimental history, and the third produced an illustrated artist's journal that had for its inspiration the sketches of such Civil War artists as Alfred Waud and Winslow Homer.

Appropriately, the course ended with dedication ceremonies. Each group unveiled its monument and had a member read its dedication speech; the magisterial figure of Joshua Chamberlain crowned the work dedicated to the 20th Maine (figure 4); the 69th Pennsylvania presented an impressive minié ball capped with a gallant flag bearer (figure 5); and three infantrymen formed the monument to the 6th Wisconsin (figure 6). Their labor complete, the students returned to the 20th century and shared a well-deserved banquet.

No teacher could have asked for more than what these students gave, working literally night and day to bring their designs to life. And inspiring them were those compelling objects of granite and bronze, formed by memory, that inhabit the haunting landscape of Gettysburg.

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